GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS
LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:5102
ANSWERED ON:28.04.2005
GAS EXPLORATION ON ORISSA COAST
Nedurumalli Janardhana Reddy Shri

Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Petroleum Conservation Research Association (PCRA) has opposed Gas Exploration on the Orissa coast as it would pose a serious threat to the breeding Olive Ridley Turtles.

(b) if so; the reaction of the Government thereto;

(c) whether the matter has been taken up with the Ministry of Environment and Forests for clearance;

(d) if so; the details thereof; and

(e) the response of the Ministry of Environment and Forests in the matter?

Answer

MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS & PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR)

(a) & (b) The Petroleum Conservation Research Association (PCRA) have given their views on the possible impact of exploration and production operations on Olive Ridley Turtles on the Orissa coast. Executive Director, PCRA has opined that there is a need for a detailed study on the issue of Olive Ridley Turtles along the Orissa coast and until such a study is undertaken, it might be to withhold permission for exploration and drilling activities in this area.

All operators are required to take environment clearance from the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, which is the nodal Ministry for granting environment clearances. This Ministry fully support the imperative of sustainable development of hydrocarbon resources keeping the environment and bio-diversity fully protected.

(c) to (e) : Obtaining environmental clearances is the responsibility of the operating companies. Normally, they make applications along with Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) studies and other required details to Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India. Reliance Industries Ltd. (RIL) had applied for environmental clearances in respect of two exploration blocks, namely, NEC-OSN-97/2 (in North-East coast offshore) and MN-DWN-98/2 (in Mahanadi deepwater area).

The Ministry of Environment and Forests have allowed exploratory drilling in the block NEC-OSN-97/2 during the period April to November subject to normal terms and conditions mentioned in the environment clearance, but have stated that under no circumstances, should exploratory activity be undertaken during the remaining period of the year i.e. December to March. It further stipulated that exploratory drilling operation for the block MN-DWN-98/2 should be deferred till the area of mass congregation and migratory routes are identified through qualified researchers. Specific approval of the Ministry of Environment and Forests is review to be obtained before commencing drilling operations in the block. Further, it has been stipulated that RIL should commission a multi-disciplinary study immediately through qualified researchers on the marine life forms and the movement of Olive Ridley sea turtles and to complete the study by May, 2005. This study should include satellite telemetry studies at all the three nesting and congregating sites adjoining the exploratory grounds. RIL may involve Wildlife Institute of India and other experienced agencies for undertaking the study.